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# Security Council

Seventy-first year

*Provisional*

**7657**th meeting
Thursday, 24 March 2016, 10.15 a.m.
New York

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| *President*: | Mr. Gaspar Martins | (Angola) |
| *Members*: | China | Mr. Shen Bo |
| | Egypt | Mr. Aboulatta |
| | France | Mr. Delattre |
| | Japan | Mr. Yoshikawa |
| | Malaysia | Mr. Ibrahim |
| | New Zealand | Mr. Van Bohemen |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Safronkov |
| | Senegal | Mr. Seck |
| | Spain | Mr. González de Linares Palou |
| | Ukraine | Mr. Yelchenko |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Mr. Rycroft |
| | United States of America | Mr. Pressman |
| | Uruguay | Mr. Rossselli |
| | Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) | Mr. Ramírez Carreño |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President**: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

In now give the floor to Mladenov.

**Mr. Mladenov**: The past month has been marked by some of the bloodiest incidents in the current wave of violence throughout Israel and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. On 8 March, a 28-year-old American graduate student, Taylor Force, was killed in Jaffa during a vicious stabbing spree by a Palestinian that left a dozen Israelis and several tourists wounded. Less than an hour before that, two Israeli police officers were seriously wounded in a shooting attack near Jerusalem's Old City, while at almost the same time an Israeli man was stabbed in an attack outside Tel Aviv. Thankfully he survived. Israeli security forces killed the Palestinian perpetrators in the first two incidents, while in the third the attacker was reportedly killed by his own knife in a struggle with his intended victim.

Six months into this latest round of violence, which has killed 30 Israelis and 198 Palestinians, with most of the Palestinians killed while reportedly carrying out knife, gun or car-ramming attacks, it is time that the international community move beyond mere condemnations of such acts of terror and violence. It is time to send a clear message to both parties. To the Palestinian people we need to say clearly: stabbing someone in the street will not bring about a Palestinian State, and neither will praising and glorifying violence in the media. Those radicals determined to poison the minds of Palestinian youth must recognize their central role in the slow evisceration of the dream of Palestinian statehood. By the same token, we must also be very clear, and Israel should understand that building more walls and increasing administrative detentions, punitive demolitions and movement restrictions are all actions that breed anger among people who feel that they are being collectively humiliated, punished and discriminated against.

Heavy-handed responses play into the hands of extremists, undermine moderate voices and further deepen the gulf between the two sides. Six months after the initial upsurge of violence, it remains blatantly clear that security measures alone will not contain the forces that are perpetuating the violence. Israelis and Palestinians must at long last face the stark realities that continue to drive the violence and hold the two-State solution hostage. First and foremost, that means both sides actively taking steps that demonstrate their commitment to, and create the conditions for, an eventual return to negotiations to achieve a viable Palestinian State and ensure Israel's long-term security.

We in the international community must also be clear both in our understanding of the conflict and our role in how to help resolve it. Our immediate priority must be ending the violence that is tearing Israelis and Palestinians apart when both face the rise of radicals among their own constituents. We only need to look at the rest of the region to see the dangers of religious extremism, sectarianism and terrorism. But let us also be abundantly clear that the current security challenges cannot be addressed if we lose sight of the fundamental problems that have led us here, namely, the persistent inability to achieve a just and lasting solution that meets the national aspirations of the Palestinians and Israelis and allows them to live in two States, side-by-side and in peace, security and mutual recognition. That is why today we must once again play an important role by saying that the prospect of a two-State solution is not dead and that it remains the best pathway for peace.

The time has come however to sound the alarm that the two-State solution is slipping from our fingers and that it is disappearing as the realities on the ground — driven by ongoing settlement activities and confiscation of Palestinian land, as well as the ongoing lack of genuine Palestinian unity — make the prospect of a viable and independent Palestinian State less possible and less likely. The time has come for us to speak clearly with regard to the risks that undermine the two-State solution, but also point to the way to a return to meaningful negotiations. That is why the Secretary-General, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, all of whom are members of the Middle East Quartet, have stepped up their efforts to break the political impasse.

The Quartet envoys have started their work on a report that will review the situation on the ground, identify the dangers facing a two-State solution and provide recommendations on the way forward. We remain seriously concerned that current trends — including continued acts of violence against civilians, incitement, ongoing settlement activity and the high rate of demolitions of Palestinian structures — are dangerously imperilling the viability of a two-State solution.

And yet while the international community explores avenues for constructive engagement, there are trends that raise questions about the commitment of the parties to seriously address the main challenges blocking progress towards peace.Israel's settlement enterprise continues, despite broad international condemnation. In a particularly troubling development, on 10 March, Israel classified 580 acres south of the city of Jericho, in the West Bank, as so called State land. The area includes the reported approval of 378 acres, which was widely condemned in January. That is evidence of an ongoing Israeli policy of systematic consolidation of its control of the occupied West Bank in direct contravention of international law. Since the early 1980s, Israeli authorities in the West Bank have adopted — based on a controversial interpretation of the Ottoman Land Code — a policy of declaring land that is not otherwise registered as private as State land. That has resulted in the State seizing control over certain areas where Palestinians claim ownership and has proved to be a precursor for settlement construction. Any such declaration, particularly of a large scale, raises justified concerns over further settlement expansion. Settlements are illegal under international law, and I urge Israel to halt and reverse such decisions.

The demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures across the West Bank has also surged in 2016, with 468 houses and other structures demolished since the beginning of the year. On 23 March, Israeli authorities demolished 53 structures in Khirbet Tana, including 22 homes, the third demolition this year in that community because Israel has declared the area a firing zone. The total number of structures demolished or confiscated in the first 12 weeks of 2016 has now reached 85 per cent of the total number demolished or confiscated for all of 2015. As Palestinians are consistently denied permits to build legally, residents in the affected areas are left with few options but to build without permits, leaving them in constant fear of their homes and livelihoods being destroyed. I urge Israel to respect international humanitarian law and cease such unfair and unjust planning processes in the West Bank.

Allow me to turn briefly to political developments on the Palestinian front. Achieving genuine Palestinian unity on the basis of non-violence, democracy and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) principles would constitute a crucial building block for the foundation of a Palestinian State. The formation of a national unity Government that abides by the PLO programme and the holding of long-overdue elections are important elements of that process. Sadly, we are nowhere near that goal, since recent discussions between Palestinian factions in Qatar have yet to yield any agreement. I strongly encourage the factions not to squander this important opportunity to reach a consensus that can enable the advancement of long-term Palestinian national goals as well as near-term fiscal and development goals for the Palestinian people.

I take this opportunity to welcome the suspension, on 12 March, of the month-long Palestinian teachers' strike, following President Abbas's commitment to fully implementing a 2013 trade union deal that gives them a 10 per cent salary increase. I also note that, on 10 March, a Fatah member of the Palestine Legislative Committee ended her 18-day sit-in at the Parliament building after the Attorney General cancelled an arrest order against her that had been issued after she had raised allegations of corruption. Such allegations must be duly investigated.

Turning to Gaza, the security situation remains volatile, as a number of factors continue to produce a highly combustible environment. Despite a relative pause over the past month, the past weeks saw five rockets fired from Gaza to Israel. In response, on 12 March, Israel conducted four air strikes, in which two Palestinian children, Israa and Yassin Abu Khusa, were tragically killed. Such incidents point to the fragile nature of the current ceasefire. I call on all the Palestinian factions in Gaza to uphold the current ceasefire, which is vital to the Strip's recovery.

The Reconstruction Mechanism continues to enable the purchase of materials for rebuilding and doing critical repairs to homes in Gaza that were damaged or destroyed in 2014. Unfortunately, the reconstruction of homes that were completely destroyed continues to be painfully slow, largely due to the slow disbursement of donor pledges. I strongly encourage all Member States that have not done so to make their disbursements

without delay. Failure to comprehensively address the chronic problems affecting Gaza risks another escalation in the future.

To touch on Lebanon, on 16 March the Security Council was briefed by Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the Secretary-General for Lebanon. The Secretary-General welcomed the Council's subsequent press statement reaffirming its united support for Lebanon's stability and State institutions. The Secretary-General is currently on a two-day visit to Lebanon together with the President of the World Bank. The visit in itself illustrates the strong commitment of the United Nations and the international community to helping Lebanon address the multiple challenges it faces as a result of the Syrian crisis.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that there can be no peace without hope. But fostering hope requires courageous leadership that is willing to articulate a clear political horizon. It requires moving beyond unilateral actions and ending the policy of eternal management of the shifting status quo, and a commitment to improving the dynamics on the ground with the genuine aim of reaching a negotiated two-State solution, which still remains the stated goal of both sides. The obstacles are certainly many, but none of them are insurmountable.

People often say that the lack of trust between the parties precludes any advance towards peace. Re-establishing that trust and laying the foundations for a peaceful resolution must of course remain our collective focus, but change unquestionably requires the political will of the parties. Without it, Palestinians and Israelis will continue to face an uncertain and dangerous future as the violent and unpredictable tectonics of the Middle East continue to shift around them.

**The President**: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.*